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## ***Egmont* and Memory**

**Steffan Davies**

*Egmont* is an attractive drama, but perennially difficult to interpret. Its students, from seminar discussions to scholarly volumes, find it hard to square Egmont's sound political principles with his apparent political naivety; the drama's structure seems elusive even though its plot is easy to follow. Critics must account, as Jim Reed puts it concisely in *The Classical Centre*, for 'the poetic strength of the play but also its weakness as drama and the weakness of its hero'.<sup>1</sup> Goethe himself was uneasy with a drama that had been twelve years in the making (1775–1787: see FA, I, 5, pp. 1234–39), entrusting its revision for performance on the Weimar stage to Schiller in 1796. Part of the problem is that the drama does not really fit the binaries that at first glance look like promising approaches: freedom versus tyranny, candour versus cunning, naivety versus insight, public versus private. Tracing a different thread – memory – in *Egmont* not only argues for the relevance in the eighteenth century of a topic that is often associated, first and foremost, with the traumas of the twentieth; it also offers a way to reconsider some of the seemingly intractable problems in the play.

The past is present in the opening speech of *Egmont*. 'Drei Ringe schwarz, die habt ihr eure Tage nicht geschossen' (I. Armbrustschießen; FA, I, 5, p. 461): Jetter has never in his life managed the shot he would need to win now, and so Soest reasonably expects to win. But of course it is not to be: Buyck, the outsider and soldier under Egmont, intervenes and upsets the established order. He takes Jetter's turn, wins the tournament, and insists, against tradition, of buying his competitors not a half but a full round of drinks. He may have been

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<sup>1</sup> T. J. Reed, *The Classical Centre: Goethe and Weimar 1775–1832* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 51.

crowned the winner of their game, but that does not bind him to their rules: 'Ich bin fremd und König und achte eure Gesetze und Herkommen nicht' (p. 462). As the scene continues, the past returns again, first in the memories of the battles of St Quentin and Gravelines. Those memories are immediate and partial: Ruysum recalls St Quentin as the battle that made him an invalid, but Buyck's lively, swashbuckling memory of Gravelines drowns him out: 'Freunde! da gings frisch! den Sieg haben wir allein.' (p. 463) Ruysum and Buyck's chorus 'Es lebe der Krieg!' (p. 466) triggers a third set of references to the past: Jetter's memory of the Spanish occupation of Brussels, which we later learn still gives him nightmares. Do you realise what you're wishing for? asks Jetter – remember the sigh of relief we all heaved when the Spaniards left.

These opening dialogues suggest two connected but distinct approaches to the past. One sees a past that can be categorised and rationally apprehended, and that creates reasonable expectations of the future: Jetter's biography, a successful tailor perhaps, but a poor shot. The other past is one that does not work by logical reconstruction, but rather through affect, emotion, immediacy and relation to the present. Its objects are the recent, the directly experienced and the seen: those lived battles and the Spanish occupation, retold according to their retrospective importance for the here and now. This is a personal, subjective, even intimate past, vividly remembered. The first might be called history, and the second memory, and they mark a tension among the drama's characters both as attitudes to the past and as ways of knowing.

Writers on cultural memory consistently distinguish history and memory, even though they are also interconnected, and even though in broad terms the same things can be said of both. Claims that the past is called upon to shape the present, or that the past is reconstructed

from the present's point of view, apply equally to the two. What are the differences? Pierre Nora, introducing the French *lieux de mémoire* project, suggested that 'memory is life' and 'a perpetually actual phenomenon'; history, on the other hand, rests on rupture: it is 'the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer', it 'calls for analysis and criticism'. For Nora, 'memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects'; history works by abstraction.<sup>2</sup> Aleida Assmann is more conciliatory: she aligns memory in Nora's sense with 'Funktionsgedächtnis' and history with memory as storage, 'Speichergedächtnis', and in doing this she consciously draws on Nietzsche's distinction between 'archival history' and the apprehension of the past that is useful for 'life'.<sup>3</sup> Memory and history are opposites for Assmann, but they also depend on each other, not least as mutual correctives. The hallmarks of functional memory are 'Gruppenbezug, Selektivität, Wertbindung und Zukunftsorientierung',<sup>4</sup> but history is the reserve on which it draws.

Goethe's own writings on history make little systematic use of the terms 'Gedächtnis' or 'Erinnerung', but they pre-empt this thinking in two ways. First, they keenly and consistently ask what the individual's place is in history: how individuals and individual, lived experience relate to the historical process, be that in forming that process or in conflicting with it. The famous verdict on Shakespeare in 1771, 'seine Stücke drehen sich alle um den geheimen Punkt [...] in dem das Eigentümliche unseres Ichs, die prätendierte Freiheit unsres Willens mit dem notwendigen Gang des Ganzen zusammenstoßt' (FA I, 18, p. 11), established

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<sup>2</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', trans. by Marc Roudebush, *Representations*, 132 (1989), 7–24 (pp. 8–9).

<sup>3</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich: Beck, 1999), pp. 130–142; see Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen. Zweites Stück: Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben' [1874], in *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), I, 243–334.

<sup>4</sup> Assmann, p. 134.

a lifelong theme. Memory's function in constituting individual identity was an early modern innovation, notably, though not uncontroversially, in the philosophy of John Locke;<sup>5</sup> Gabriel Motzkin, in a study focused on *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, sees memory as basic to the relationship between self and other in Goethe's thought.<sup>6</sup> Second and connected to this, Goethe persistently looked for ways to capture *experience* beyond what is available to the historian. Some of the maxims in his *Theory of Colour* convey this in brief. He seems close to Nora when he writes:

Es gibt zweierlei Erfahrungsarten, die Erfahrung des Abwesenden und die des Gegenwärtigen. Die Erfahrung des Abwesenden, wozu das Vergangene gehört, machen wir auf fremde Autorität, die des Gegenwärtigen sollten wir auf eigene Autorität machen. Beides gehörig zu tun, ist die Natur des Individuums durchaus unzulänglich. (FA, I, 23/1, p. 614)

Jim Reed has connected these ideas back to *Egmont*. On the face of it, he points out, Schiller's *Don Karlos* is driven by high, perhaps distant, ideals; *Egmont* draws on the same past but 'out of a commitment to concrete local realities'. *Don Karlos* seems to be about more abstract ideas, about 'history'; *Egmont* is an early and down-to-earth expression of *Historismus*. He goes on to argue that the two visions are nonetheless 'wholly compatible' in a common cause: 'The historicist vision is not so much a rival of the Enlightenment as its convincing embodiment in time and place.' '[P]rinciple remains pale, reality is potentially chaotic,' he

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<sup>5</sup> Assmann, pp. 95–100. On Goethe and Locke: Stefan Keppler, *Grenzen des Ich: Die Verfassung des Subjekts in Goethes Romanen und Erzählungen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), pp. 112–17.

<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Motzkin, 'Goethe's Theory of Memory', in *Goethe und das Zeitalter der Romantik*, ed. by Walter Hinderer (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002), pp. 151–62.

writes; bridging the dichotomy between them was one of the Enlightenment's 'central problem[s] and task[s]'.<sup>7</sup>

For a historical drama, there is very little 'sense of history' in *Egmont*, insofar as the drama's characters very rarely think about the historical past and less still about its specifics. Given that, the 'historians' among the characters stand out all the more. Vansen is the most prominent, the clerk and rabble-rouser who enters the action in Act Two and tells the citizens about their historic rights. He has certainly done his research: 'Ich hatte einen alten Patron, der besaß Pergamente und Briefe, von uralten Stiftungen, Kontrakten und Gerechtigkeiten, er hielt auf die rarsten Bücher. In einem stund unsre ganze Verfassung [...].' (II. Platz in Brüssel; FA, I, 5, p. 483) Vansen's key medium is the written word – the book – and it is his claims about what he has read that turn the citizens' cry from 'Ordnung und Freiheit!' to 'Freiheit und Privilegien'. Brackenburg remembers his book learning at school, and how 'Brutus Rede für die Freiheit' once fired him up (I. Bürgerhaus; p. 479), but this is a memory relegated to Assmann's 'store', serving only to contrast with his impotence in the present.<sup>8</sup> Klärchen, by

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<sup>7</sup> T. J. Reed, *Light in Germany: Scenes from an Unknown Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 70–71. Friedrich Meinecke's chapter on Goethe as a forerunner of *Historismus* (1936) saw in *Egmont*, like *Götz von Berlichingen*, an expression of 'der verborgene Springquell der echten Individualität, der "innere Kern ihrer Eigenheit"': Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, ed. by Carl Hinrichs, 4th edn (Munich, Oldenbourg, 1965), p. 461; cf. *Egmont*, IV. Der Culenburgerische Palast; FA, I, 5, p. 528.

<sup>8</sup> Brackenburg is probably referring to (Marcus Iunius) Brutus, the murderer of Caesar: see Mathew Bell, "'This was a man!'" Goethe's *Egmont* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, *MLR*, 111 (2016), 141–61 (pp. 146–47). In *Julius Caesar*, III. 1. 103–10, Brutus tells his fellow assassins to wash their hands in Caesar's blood, 'And waving our red weapons o'er our heads | Let's all cry, "Peace, Freedom and Liberty."' Cassius sees this as an act for posterity: 'Stoop, then, and wash. How many ages hence | Shall this our lofty scene be acted over | In states unborn and accents yet unknown?' (lines 111–13). The speech is out of character for Shakespeare's Brutus, but it well fits Brackenburg's memory of his adolescence: 'damals kocht es und trieb!' Lucius Iunus Brutus, the – possibly unhistorical – founder of the Roman Republic in 509 BCE, might be another candidate, but a less likely one. His supposed oath and speech in defence of Rome's freedom after deposing the king, Tarquinius Superbus, are reported by Livy (1. 59) and at length by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Antiquitates Romanae*,

contrast with him, is not a historian who laments a better past: rather, driven by that live memory of Egmont when he is not around, by the power of seeing him and of imagining his presence, she shows history at the service of memory, the past accessed to inform immediacy. Klärchen nearly lets out the secret of her affair when she sees a woodcut diagram of the battle of Gravelines hanging at her cousin's house, showing Egmont, as in Buyck's description, with his horse shot dead underneath him, and she sends Brackenburg to exchange the book she has been reading for 'wieder so eine Historie' (I. Bürgerhaus; pp. 478–79).

The other historian, and the most revealing and puzzling, is Machiavell; indeed Machiavell and Margarete von Parma are the two characters apart from Egmont – with whom they never appear on stage – who do the most to complicate black-and-white interpretations of the play. In his first scene with the Regent, in Act I, Machiavell has written up a blunt report on the 'iconoclastic fury' to send to King Philip; it is 'ausführlich und umständlich wie es der König liebt' (I. Palast der Regentin; p. 469). Margarete will sign the report, but her attitude to the events is different. She is haunted by them, and the thought of them gives her no peace. Machiavell reading his report only pricks and pains her imagination again. Machiavell has a concrete, reasonable proposal to improve matters: tolerate the new faith, and the rebels will have nothing to rebel about.<sup>9</sup> But Margarete has seldom taken his advice in the past, he says, and: 'Ihr sagtet oft im Scherze, du siehst zu weit Machiavell, du solltest Geschichtschreiber sein, wer handelt muß fürs nächste sorgen. Und doch habe ich diese Geschichte nicht voraus erzählt? hab ich nicht alles vorausgesehen.' (p. 469) Historians, then, see into the future; the

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4. 50–84), but neither of those texts could so memorably have fired up the young Brackenburg.

<sup>9</sup> On Machiavell and his 'entirely practical' stance, see Ritchie Robertson, 'Goethe and Machiavelli', in *The Present Word: Culture, Society and the Site of Literature. Essays in Honour of Nicholas Boyle*, ed. by John Walker (Oxford: Legenda, 2013), pp. 126–37 (pp. 128–30).

immediacy with which Margarete apprehends the past translates into an immediate grasp of the present. Haunted by events, Margarete points out the immediate reasons why Machiavell's good plan will not work. She knows well enough that pragmatism over principle is part of politics, but Machiavell's proposal is worldly (there is no right to apply it to matters spiritual) and in any case, Philip will never allow it. Here is a clear reminder that immediacy correlates with emotion but not with fantasy: haunted Margarete is being more realistic here than pragmatic Machiavell. Both are right, Machiavell in his fear, later borne out by events, that repression will cause revolt, and Margarete in seeing that what he advises is no solution. In their second dialogue, in Act Three, it is Margarete, not Machiavell, who is capable of reading between the lines of Philip's reply. When Margarete imagines the scheming at the Spanish court that the letter does not convey, Machiavell is sceptical – 'Ihr habt zu dem Gemälde einen guten Farbtopf gewählt' – but it is she who will be proved right (III. Palast der Regentin; p. 503).

Egmont similarly works with that immediacy that distinguishes memory from history. On his first appearance he is dismissive of the clamour for 'rights and privileges', but he remembers Jetter just as he remembers anyone he has met before. He sees his position as guaranteed by symbolic objects, notably the insignia of the Golden Fleece, rather than by historical status. Memory deals equally in lived experience and in notions from a distant but not a historically dated past, and indeed, it might be said that Egmont plays fast and loose with history. The title he uses, '*Graf* Egmont', evokes his ancestral claim to the county of Geldern, lost to Burgundy and thence to Spain (I. Palast der Regentin; p. 472), but when it suits him the wrongs of the past can also be forgotten over time. Alba reminds him, not unfairly, that the right of Dutch citizens to be ruled by their 'brothers' in reality means the right of the aristocracy to rule *over* them; 'Das ist vor Jahrhunderten geschehen', Egmont



replies, 'und wird jetzt ohne Neid geduldet' (iv. Der Culenburgische Palast; p. 527). Philip II of Spain is king by historical accident, 'durch gut Glück', as Vansen tells the citizens (ii. Platz in Brüssel; p. 483); by contrast Buyck has told the same crowd in the opening scene that Egmont, as an archer at least, does not depend on luck or mood; he is just a natural ('nein wie er anlegt immer schwarz geschossen', p. 462).

Egmont's perceived immediacy is what gives his character the charismatic authority that Frank Lamport has identified with Egmont, Götz von Berlichingen, Wallenstein and others.<sup>10</sup> Charismatic rule, as defined by Max Weber, rests on 'die außeralltägliche Hingabe an die Heiligkeit oder die Heldenkraft oder die Vorbildlichkeit einer Person und der durch sie offenbarten oder geschaffenen Ordnungen'.<sup>11</sup> Such devotion is evident when the burghers first mention Egmont: 'warum trügen wir ihn alle auf den Händen? Weil man ihm ansieht daß er uns wohlwill, weil ihm die Fröhlichkeit, das freie Leben die gute Meinung aus den Augen sieht' (i. Armbrustschießen; p. 463). It thus cuts through rational ties, whereas 'traditional' rule and 'legal' authority (i.e. that of the modern, bureaucratic state) depend on them. It rests on emotion – Weber elsewhere rephrased his definition to emphasise '*affektuelle* Hingabe an die Person des Herrn' – and on the perception of 'eine *als* außeralltäglich [...] *geltende* Qualität einer Persönlichkeit'.<sup>12</sup> It is carried by the popular support that it commands and it collapses – as does Egmont's appeal in Act Five – once that support is lost. Egmont with his secretary Richard thus 'hates writing' and has little time for the bureaucracy on his desk, and he asks Richard to forge his handwriting in reply to a letter from Count Oliva warning him that danger

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<sup>10</sup> F. J. Lamport, 'The Charismatic Hero: Goethe, Schiller, and the Tragedy of Character', *PEGS*, 58 (1988), 62–83.

<sup>11</sup> Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 3rd edn, 2 vols (Tübingen: Mohr, 1947), I, 124.

<sup>12</sup> Max Weber, 'Die drei reinen Typen der legitimen Herrschaft', in Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. by Johannes Winckelmann, 7th edn (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988), pp. 475–88 (p. 481); Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, I, 140 (my emphases).

is at hand (II. Egmonts Wohnung). That letter from Oliva is significant, because in it Oliva appeals to Egmont's involvement in the the 'beggars' movement': after noble petitioners to Margaret of Parma were dismissed in 1566 as 'beggars' (*gueux*), they took this as a badge of honour and the name and symbol of their revolt. Oliva seems to be warning Egmont specifically that what may have started harmlessly and spontaneously now looks more and more, and dangerously, like open rebellion, but Egmont is in no mood to take this distant, written warning seriously: 'Schenke mir diese Betrachtungen, wir wollen sie Schülern und Höflingen überlassen, sie mögen sinnen und aussinnen, wandeln und schleichen, gelangen wohin sie können, erschleichen was sie können.' (p. 493) And however you reply, Richard, says Egmont, please don't make it read like a book.

Out of those two approaches to the past, it is memory that works with the imagination (rather than powers of recall), that works by emotion, through impressions and appearance. Nora describes memory as 'affective and magical', as being 'responsive to all methods of transfer'.<sup>13</sup> Memory is about telling stories, but those stories are not fixed; memory can be decisive in how we act without being fully coherent. Social psychologist Jürgen Straub writes that memory is 'constructed and re-constructed in the process of recollecting, at times spontaneously and seemingly unsystematically and at other times in a deliberate and focused manner'.<sup>14</sup> In *Egmont*, the other decisive expression of this same tension is sight. This is no coincidence: thinkers from Aristotle onwards have seen visual perception as part of how we

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<sup>13</sup> Nora, 'Between Memory and History', p. 8, quoted with modification; cf. Pierre Nora, 'Entre Mémoire et Histoire: La problématique des lieux', in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. by Pierre Nora, 7 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–92), 1 (1984), xv–xlii (p. xix).

<sup>14</sup> Jürgen Straub, 'Psychology, Narrative, and Cultural Memory: Past and Present', in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 215–28 (p. 218).

remember and how we articulate our memories.<sup>15</sup> ‘Imagist’ accounts of memory may struggle to distinguish adequately between memory and imagination in the mechanics of individual recollection – ‘How’, asks Mary Warnock, ‘do we know that an image does not relate to the future, rather than the past?’<sup>16</sup> – but in their broader, cultural application, the blurred distinction is productive: it is memory more than history that also allows people to imagine what *could* be in the future. That first comment on Egmont places visual imagination at the base of the burghers’ allegiance to him: ‘Weil man ihm *ansieht* daß er uns wohlwill, weil ihm die Fröhlichkeit, das freie Leben die gute Meinung *aus den Augen sieht*’ (my emphasis). If this is a drama about ‘different ways of seeing’, as Elizabeth Wilkinson called it,<sup>17</sup> then the phrase can take us on to John Berger’s television series and his influential book of the same title, published in 1972, which begins:

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.

But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.<sup>18</sup>

Seeing, then, also fits the unpredictability and the resistance to fixity that has also been associated with memory in the decades since Berger’s book.

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<sup>15</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Memory*, The New Critical Idiom (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 11; see further David Bloch, *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection: Text, Translation, Interpretation, and Reception in Western Scholasticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Mary Warnock, *Memory* (London: Faber, 1987), p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth M. Wilkinson, ‘The Relation of Form and Meaning in Goethe’s *Egmont*’, in Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, *Goethe: Poet and Thinker* (London: Arnold, 1962), pp. 55–74 (p. 63); see also Reed, *The Classical Centre*, p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 7.

Egmont is imagined before he is seen; indeed Schiller in his review (1788), complaining that the drama was not historical enough, deemed his image as a great man to be a matter of hearsay (NA, 22, p. 202). Once he is on stage, Egmont's concern with immediacy comes across in his constant awareness of appearance; he has grasped the power of 'memory politics' and political imagery from the outset. What is perplexing about his dismissal of Oliva's letter is that he clearly does remember the episode and how he dressed his servants in new liveries to perpetuate the joke about the nobles being 'beggars': this is why he remembers Jetter, who made the new uniforms, and Margarete remembers the episode too (I. Palast der Regentin; p. 473). Egmont knows the political significance of appearance: this is precisely the basis of both his objection to Oranien – that if they leave the Netherlands they will *look* like rebels and that will *make* them rebels – and his appeal to Alba, which centres on how best to gain the trust of the people. The dialogue with Alba centres on affect: on fears and rumours, and on popular perceptions of legitimate rule. Egmont knows that if he wants to keep his prized independence, he has to be all things to all people: the warrior *and* the peacemaker, the aristocrat *and* the citizen's friend, the Dutchman *and* the loyal servant of Spain. When Machiavelli the historian judges that '[Egmont] scheint mir in allem nach seinem Gewissen zu handeln', Margarete, who watches more closely, replies that 'Sein Gewissen hat einen gefälligen Spiegel' (I. Palast der Regentin; p. 473). His appearance to Klärchen in Spanish dress (III. Clärchens Wohnung) is meant to impress her, and perhaps to reassure her that he will be safe under the occupation, but it also gives the lie, visually, to the earlier claim among the citizens that he is 'der echte Niederländer, gar so nichts spanisches' (II. Platz in Brüssel; p. 487); indeed in that same dialogue, Jetter the tailor has already spotted that his coat has a modern, Spanish cut. Egmont himself tells Klärchen how politics means dissimulation, and when he then tells her 'Das ist dein Egmont' (III. Clärchens Wohnung; p. 509), there is no real reason

for the audience to see this as the ‘real’ Egmont in private versus false ones in public. Rather, that Egmont is another one of the many.

Memory as a key to the politics of this play cuts through the simple distinction between good politics and bad. *Egmont* invites binary interpretation, but as Wilkinson pointed out, that binary interpretation ultimately falls short.<sup>19</sup> In structural terms, too, the drama’s cyclical nature prevents any single character from appearing as Egmont’s full antagonist, as he only has one scene with each.<sup>20</sup> This is a drama about freedom’s stand against despotism, and it contributed to making the Dutch Revolt a ‘respectable vehicle’ in Goethe’s own time, in Jonathan Israel’s words, for ‘portraying, considering, and perhaps even exalting popular insurrection against tyranny’.<sup>21</sup> The Dutch Revolt can thus be seen as part of eighteenth-century collective memory, and Goethe’s drama cemented Egmont’s place in Flemish, and notably Belgian, identity in the nineteenth century and beyond.<sup>22</sup> Yet on the other hand, Egmont can be seen as attractive but fatally naïve, a ‘questionable politician’ who is perhaps not up to the job of ‘talking to tyrants’.<sup>23</sup>

Much is untidy here because methods and morals do not divide cleanly along the same lines. If Egmont’s good politics rely on imagination, then so too does the stock-in-trade of Alba’s tyranny, which is fear. Appearance is decisive on both sides of the coin: Margarete

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<sup>19</sup> Wilkinson, esp. pp. 66–69.

<sup>20</sup> Georg-Michael Schulz, ‘Egmont’, in *Goethe Handbuch. II: Dramen*, ed. by Theo Buck (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997), pp. 154–72 (p. 156).

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 746.

<sup>22</sup> Rengenier C. Rittersma, *Egmont da capo – eine mythogenetische Studie* (Münster: Waxmann, 2009), pp. 274–78.

<sup>23</sup> Martin W. Swales, ‘A Questionable Politician: A Discussion of the Ending to Goethe’s “Egmont”’, *MLR*, 66 (1971), 832–40; T. J. Reed, ‘Talking to Tyrants: Dialogues with Power in Eighteenth-Century Germany’, *The Historical Journal*, 33 (1990), 63–79.

knows that her good work will pale at a distance ('[es] sieht gewiß in der Ferne wie nichts aus, eben weils gut ist': III. Palast der Regentin; p. 503) while the burghers know that repressive regimes trump up the most innocent mistake – humming the Calvinist Psalms – into serious crimes: if something looks like rebellion then it *is* rebellion. Egmont may claim that there is a 'public' and a 'private' Egmont but in fact he breaks down that very divide; Alba's regime is cynically in pursuit of the same thing, wanting sight, 'Offenbarung', of what goes on in private by getting family members to spy on each other (IV. Straße; p. 510). What about naivety? In Margarete's case, her emotional apprehension of the riots makes her more realistic than Machiavell. Whilst Egmont's politics are indeed those of emotion and appearance, those, too, should not be dismissed out of hand as flimsy or detached. Egmont is the enemy of calculation – this is the 'Spanish way' (II. Egmonts Wohnung; p. 491) and it is a bone of contention between him and Oranien – but surely he and Oranien are in fact as calculating as each other, just in unlike terms. Egmont calculates that leaving the Netherlands will trigger rebellion because of how it will look, just as Oranien calculates that staying will mean certain death. And at that point, Oranien's calculation does not rest on greater factual knowledge. The game-changing moment in their dialogue is much-quoted: 'Alba ist unterwegs. Egmont: Ich glaubs nicht. Oranien: Ich weiß es' – but we need to read on: 'Egmont: Die Regentin wollte nichts wissen. Oranien: Um so mehr *bin ich überzeugt*' (II. Egmonts Wohnung; p. 497, my emphasis). Oranien is not informed, but convinced. Like Machiavell and Margarete in their first dialogue, both men are right. Egmont reads the logic of tyranny just as accurately as Oranien: disobedience means rebellion, rebellion will mean misery. He fully understands the gravity of the new regime. It was all very well to dress the servants like beggars under Margaret of Parma, but that kind of stunt has no place now; perhaps he has paid more attention to Oliva's letter than he admits. Reading *Egmont* in 2017 is salutary, because

although the big issues are crystal clear, the way politics is conducted is only in part principled, or rational, or predictable, and there is no suggestion of a single or simple or best way out of the mess.

What tracing memory in this drama does let us do is to place Egmont emphatically as a representative of a new, forward-looking politics, even if he is also its victim. He is as much a 'new politician' as Oranien and Alba, not a remnant of the old; charisma is the antithesis of tradition. Egmont is not a latter-day Götz von Berlichingen, of whom Goethe claimed in 1771, 'Ich [...] rette das Andencken eines braven Mannes' (FA, I, 28, p. 247). The trajectories into which they fit are quite different: Götz really is the last of a dying breed, who will be forgotten by those who follow him, albeit at their peril; the Dutch Revolt had quite some measure of success. Egmont appeals very little to historical rights, and he is contemptuous of the call for them, as is Alba. He goes to Alba because his politics of image and appearance leave him little other choice, and because he thinks he can speak a language of pragmatism with him: this is what the people fear, this is how to allay it. Here Egmont's grasp of how things look meets Machiavell's vision of how things might be. Alba defends a new order in Brussels against the old, but he says the same things to Egmont that sounded like a defence of tradition when Margarete said them to Machiavell: such thinking is all very well, but not where it 'plays with God' and treats 'established doctrine' with indifference; the king is the king, and his authority will not be bent.

Memory might seem an awkward or at least an arbitrary choice of a term to glue together several related concepts – immediacy, emotion, sight versus words, new politics versus the old – were it not for the drama's fifth act. This is where Egmont returns, ultimately, to memory, to where he began in Act One – to image, or to Schiller's 'hearsay'. If Acts One to

Four are about the place of 'memory politics' in history, and in the short term, their failure against Alba's power, then Act Five is about the equally political translation of the historical Egmont into memory. One thread of consistency between Act Five and the rest of the drama is Egmont's mode of doing politics, which runs up to the final act and continues there. So, too, of course, do cold facts, of the kind with which Margarete deflated Machiavell's grand plans. Crucially that central tension remains, between memory and history and between their correlatives, the potent reality of emotion and imagination versus that of logically discernible – and unavoidable – events.

Klärchen moves in Act Five from cultivating personal memory to actively promoting Egmont as a political symbol to a crowd that no longer wants to know. When this fails, her indignation at a world in which Egmont can be condemned is mixed with the memory of their times together and with dreams of setting him free. Egmont in prison is haunted by memory (he can't sleep); whereas Oliva wrote to remind him of a specific historical episode, his mind's eye now takes him in an 'Erinnerungstraum des Glücks' (v. Gefängnis; p. 535) to a series of decisive but less defined pictures from his past, mixed up with his fear in the present. He has a vision of being freed, but remember Margarete to Machiavell: visions take time, and that is time that Egmont doesn't have, because as Brackenburg reports in the next scene, he has seen the scaffold being built, with his own eyes. The same tension between emotion and hard fact is decisive in the prison scene with Ferdinand, another admirer of Egmont since childhood. Egmont says that there are two things that are sending him to his death: one is the written judgement that Silva has just read out; the other, and the more significant, is the jealousy on which Alba has brooded since their youth: Egmont was the luckier gambler and the better shot. There is one last hope that Ferdinand has come to get him out of gaol, that there is a pragmatic solution to all this (Alba has got what he needs and can now be merciful; or you



can spirit me out of here), but no. Egmont hopes that his death might have a predictable, discernible meaning, that like Weber's 'charismatic' prophet he might yet change the expected course of history,<sup>24</sup> but again, no: 'Kann mein Blut für viele fließen, meinem Volk Friede bringen, so fließt es willig. Leider wirds nicht so werden.' (v. Gefängnis; p. 548)

Schiller's review of *Egmont* grappled with the tensions that have puzzled the critics since, objecting more than anything to the centrality in the drama of a 'great man' who turns out not to be great. He implied that finishing the play with Ferdinand's visit to Egmont, a scene that was 'meisterhaft erfunden und ausgeführt', would have been better than Goethe's choice of a 'Salto mortale in eine Opernwelt', the vision of Klärchen at its very end (NA, 22, pp. 207–08). The opera ends on deliberately dissonant notes, however, which Schiller did not hear. The final scene does not escape into dreaming; rather, it holds in tension Egmont's brutal and meaningless death on the one hand, and the vision of the Low Countries led to freedom on the other. The vision is memory in reverse, both chronologically (it is posterity at this point, a vision of what is going to be memory) and because it is a vision of how Egmont's defeat will become part of a collective memory of triumph. This might indeed seem illogical, 'ein witziger Einfall', as Schiller complained (NA, 22, p. 209), and it is a vision set far into the future, after Egmont's hopes of an immediately meaningful death have been dashed. But the scene acknowledges this very point as it goes on: day breaks on the vision, and Egmont is led off to his death by soldiers driven, so he says, by 'ein hohles Wort des Herrschers nicht ihr Gemüt' (v. Gefängnis; p. 551). It is entirely appropriate that in that last scene, the vision on the one hand clashes against the ranks of Spanish soldiers who fill the stage on the other.

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<sup>24</sup> "'Es steht geschrieben, ich aber sage Euch" gilt für den Propheten': Weber, 'Die drei reinen Typen der legitimen Herrschaft', p. 482; cf. Matthew 4. 4–10 and 5. 21–45.

Both, after all, are parts of the Dutch past; both bring together the dynamics that have competed with each other since the very start of the play.